

Iran set to launch 200-kg spy satellite into orbit

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Iran is ready to launch its second homemade spy satellite, with the Safir 2 rocket (Messenger of Ambassador) already in position on its pad, DEBKAFile's military and intelligence sources report. The new satellite weighs 200 kgs, ten times more than Omid 1 (Hope), which was successfully tested only ten months ago, on Feb. 2. Tehran's missile program is clearly rushing forward at a rapid pace. In fact, some Western and Israeli missile experts suspect it may have overtaken North Korea and that Iran no longer stands in need of technical assistance from Pyongyang or Beijing.

If the second launch succeeds, it would mean that Iran is capable of producing solid fuel-powered rockets with a range of 2,450-2,450 kilometers, which covers not only all of Israel but would reach as deep into Europe as the Polish capital of Warsaw. Heads of the Islamic regime in Tehran hope that the advent of a second Iranian spy satellite in Middle East skies, boosted by the new Safir rocket, will so astound the Americans and Israelis that they will think twice before going after Iran's nuclear installations.

Most of all, they want Israel to count the cost of being subjected to their high-grade lethal weaponry before embarking on military action.

In contrast to the Netanyahu government's outcry over the capture of the Iranian arms ship bound for Hizballah last week ("this is a real war crime"), Israel has made very little of two ominous spurts in Iran's progress toward a nuclear military capability.

1. On Nov. 4, US satellite photos were published showing that Iran had raised output at its Gchine uranium mine near Bandar Abbas and is producing enough raw ore for processing into two warheads a year.

Tehran has shut this mine to UN watchdog inspections claiming its agreement with the IAEA does not cover mining operations. The agency is therefore unable to establish where the raw uranium is going.

2. On Nov. 5, US and UK media quoted IAEA sources in Vienna as asking Iran to explain evidence that its scientists have experimented with an advanced nuclear warhead design. They referred to the discovery of high-explosive components of a "two-point implosion" device that could enable Iran to eventually install small nuclear warheads on its ballistic missiles.

Command of this process would short-cut and simplify Iran's path to fitting nuclear warheads on long-range ballistic missiles such as the Shehab-4 which is about ready to go operational.

Iran is stonewalling on this international query too, continuing to dicker over every Western compromise proposal while racing ahead with its plans.

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